

**DECISION NOTICE:
SALMON LAKE CAMPGROUND
PAVING & ELECTRIFICATION PROJECT**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Salmon Lake State Park is a 42-acre park along the beautiful Clearwater River chain of lakes in western Montana. The park includes a day-use area with a boat-launch, swim dock, latrines, picnic areas, and day-parking; and a separate campground area with 23 camping sites, a campground host, shower and restroom facilities, an amphitheater and hiking trails. The park is extremely popular, with approximately 35,000 visitors annually, mainly in the summer months.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposed to initiate a road-paving and campground improvement project within Salmon Lake State Park to be completed in multiple phases. FWP proposes to pave the day-use loop road and parking areas, install a cable-mat for the swim dock, and improve the staging area to the boat docks. In subsequent phases, as funds become available, electrical pedestals would be installed at all campsites and the interior campground road and the campsites would be paved.

The popularity of the park and the corresponding number of vehicles in both the day-use area and the campground has been an issue for several years. Currently the majority of the park's road surface is gravel with a low percentage of aggregate stone and high percentage of finely ground organic material and silt. During the summer peak use season the park roads generate large clouds of dust with every passing vehicle. This dust gets into people's eyes, nose and mouth, blows onto picnic tables and food, blows into RV's and tents, and covers everything with a fine layer. Visitors love this beautiful park, but complain earnestly about the amount of dust they encounter. The dust not only detracts from visitor's experience, but also creates safety hazards and health issues for people with any type of respiratory distress. The current gravel/organic road surface also generates mud during inclement weather.

FWP has tried to reduce the dust and particulate level at the park for years, with limited success. FWP has applied magnesium chloride (MgCl), approved by DEQ for this purpose, as dust abatement for the past five years, but this compound requires some water to be effective, and there is minimal moisture or relative humidity in the peak of the summer season in this area when dust abatement is needed the most. In addition, it is suspected that the magnesium chloride, a salt product, combined with drought and insect attack may be having a negative impact on the trees along roads within the park.

An additional problem related to the gravel surface is that parking areas cannot be permanently striped and available space is therefore used very inefficiently. During peak usage days in the summer, interior parking areas fill up because of improper parking, and additional visitors either circle repeatedly, creating congestion and stirring up dust; or park in vegetated or other prohibited areas, even on the shoulder of Hwy 83. When visitors park in front of the boat ramp, boaters do not have a staging area, and the entire area becomes clogged. Because the main loop circles in

front of the boat ramp, when that area becomes congested a traffic jam results that can stretch past the entrance booth and almost to Hwy 83. This creates a serious safety hazard as visitors attempting to enter the park find they do not have sufficient room to pull their entire rig and trailer off the highway.

The entrance of the day-use area was paved several years ago for the health and comfort of booth attendants and users waiting in line, and, based on public surveys and visitor comments, FWP feels it is appropriate to pave the remaining road system. FWP proposed paving all interior roads and parking surfaces, including the campground spurs. Creating a hardened road surface would nearly eliminate airborne particulate, which would appreciably improve air quality and visitor experience. Paving would also allow speed bumps to be installed where needed, and for striping of the road and parking areas. Parking areas would also be converted from parallel parking into head-in stalls, which also helps correct parking inefficiencies in a cost effective manner with minimal expansion.

Striping the parking areas would better delineate long-term parking areas from staging and prepping areas, and would result in users parking correctly without the constant supervision of park personnel. Using the available space efficiently would increase the number of vehicles that the park can accommodate, and lesson the incidence of unsafe parking on the highway shoulder or in other prohibited areas. Increased parking efficiency would also contribute to better traffic flow.

The staging area in front of the boat ramp would also be slightly widened as part of the paving project, which will reduce congestion at the ramp and allow for better traffic flow. Some other improvements to the day-use area that are planned as part of this project are to add concrete aprons/approaches to the two roll-in docks adjacent to the boat ramp, and to install a pre-cast concrete cable-mat for the swim dock. The purpose for the concrete aprons is to better facilitate installation, maintenance and removal of the roll-in docks, to stabilize the lake-shore at these locations and to improve ADA accessibility. The cable mat at the swim dock would also improve user access.

The paving project would be completed in multiple phases for budgetary reasons. The Salmon Lake day-use loop road and parking areas would be paved in the first phase. The electrical pedestals for the 23 campsites and the paving of the interior campground loop road would occur in subsequent phases when funding was available.

Alternative A: No Action

If no action is taken, the interior park roads and parking areas within Salmon Lake State Park would not be paved, and as a secondary part of that project, electric pedestals would not be added to each campsite. Other small improvements to the day-use area, such as a cable mat for the swim dock and concrete aprons to the boat ramp would not be implemented. This alternative would not resolve the issues impacting public health and safety or natural resource protection (tree stresses from chemical agents). By choosing the “No Action” alternative, the known safety, resource, and aesthetic issues at Salmon Lake State Park would not be addressed. The roads will continue to generate high levels of dust during the summer season, causing irritation and discomfort to park visitors and workers, sometimes severe. The gravel surface also prohibits permanent road paint from being applied, which causes inefficient parking and confusion. Incorrectly parked vehicles sometimes block the staging area for the boat ramp, which slows the flow of traffic around the main loop in the day-use area and can cause traffic jams to reach all the way to the Park entrance. This situation represents a significant safety hazard.

If electrical service is not added to campsites, noise from generators will continue to be high, which detracts from the recreational experiences of both traditional campers and RV users alike. If no action is taken, the public will likely continue to register many concerns and complaints about the lack of on-site electricity and road and parking conditions in Salmon Lake State Park.

Alternative B: Pave all interior road and parking surfaces in the day-use area and campground area of the park in multiple phases, beginning with the day-use area. Also included in the alternative would be to electrify the 23 campsites within the Salmon Lake campground.

Under this Alternative, FWP would proceed with plans to pave all interior road and parking surfaces within the park with a 2" lift of asphalt and install electric pedestals at the campsites. In this Alternative, the day-use loop road, parking and staging areas would be paved in the first phase, and roads and campground spurs would be paved in a later phase. Several small improvements to the day-use areas would also be implemented as part of the first phase, such as widening the boat-staging area, adding concrete aprons to the boat docks, installing a cable mat on the swim dock, and converting parallel parking areas into head-in stalls. Also in a later phase, electric pedestals would be provided for all (23) campsites and necessary electrical infrastructure would be installed prior to the paving.

Alternative C: Pave all interior road and parking surfaces in multiple phases, beginning with the campground and electrify the campsites.

This Alternative is identical to Alternative B except that the campground road and parking spurs would be paved first, and then the day-use area in the later phase. The electric pedestals would be installed prior to the paving of the campground. This is not the preferred Alternative because FWP managers feel that the problems at the day-use area are most urgent, and want to see those problems addressed in 2008. The issues in the campground require attention as well, but are not as severe as at the day-use area.

Alternative D: Pave the day-use area only and electrify the campsites.

In this Alternative, the day-use loop road, parking and staging areas would be paved. No work would be done in the Salmon Lake campground area. This alternative would be less expensive, but is not preferred because the dust problems caused by the campground road would continue. The electric pedestals would be installed in the campground in a later phase.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began February 29, 2008, and ran through March 31, 2008. Legal notices were published in the Missoulian, the Helena Independent Record and the Seeley Swan Pathfinder. There were 21 full copies, 6 electronic versions, and 32 post card notes about the EA sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county & state departments or agencies, and federal agencies. The EA is still available for review at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1061.aspx.

A total of 16 written responses were received during the comment period. The proposed development within Salmon Lake State Park consisted of two elements, electrifying campsites, and paving of interior roads.

Electrifying campsites: For this particular item, the majority of the comments were opposed to the idea of electrifying the campsites in the campground area.

- Some of the reasons given for opposing included; electricity is for home, not camping; cost of the project is not an appropriate use of public monies; electric outlets will increase the noise level by use of TV's and radios; government shouldn't be investing in more electrical use; philosophical disagreement in what camping is, the effort to get away from intrusions associated with civilization such as TV's blaring or air conditioners humming; campgrounds should not be a replacement for being at home; the proposal ignores the rising costs of energy, gasoline & diesel fuel; the proposal ignores the trends of fewer RV's being sold; providing high-end amenities such as electrical hook-ups directly competes with private campgrounds where such amenities exist.
- Reasons given in support of electrification of campsites included; reaching retirement age and would like to see some amenities at some of the campgrounds, spouse needs a machine to breathe at night, this limits us to private campgrounds in order to not run a generator; there are a wide range of recreationists and with the increasing number of boomers would like a little more of the basic conveniences, see no harm in providing such conveniences to those who wish to use them; improvements will improve the local economy as a whole; would be nice to stay warm in cooler weather, a forced-air furnace takes a lot of "battery juice" and don't want to use a generator at night, many state parks in the Northwest have electric outlets and they do not detract from the experience; electrification makes for a nicer, cleaner, quieter environment.

Paving interior roads: Very few of the comments received mentioned this portion of the EA proposal. Those that did were basically split on supporting it or not.

- Reasons given for opposing included; we're tent campers, when we camp want it to be in a setting of nature, not just all the conveniences of home; paving of campsites destroys tenting equipment and is unnatural.
- Reasons given in support of paving included; any improvements made will improve the local economy; stopping the use of magnesium chloride as dust abatement is a good thing to do, should at least surface the areas of the roadway that are particularly offensive.

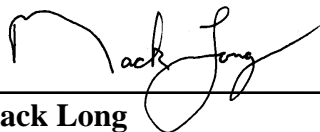
In the fall of 2006, the internal road system at Placid Lake State Park, 6 miles away from Salmon Lake State Park, was paved. During the 2007 park season, FWP received many compliments and positive comments regarding the project. Some of the comments made were: "great improvement; new paved sites are wonderful; love the new pavement; pavement is awesome; thanks for the nice pavement; compared to a year ago, the pavement has made a huge difference, very positive; good to see our tax dollars at work; pavement is nice, no dust; and, nice update."

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

It is my decision to implement Alternative D, with modifications. Those modifications are to pave only the day-use unit of the park and not install the electrical pedestals in the campground. Because of the negative comments received regarding the electrification of campsites and the controversy carried through some of the Montana papers regarding this issue, FWP needs to do further analysis on electrification of the campground. Therefore, the electrification of campsites will not be a part of this proposed action at this time. Since there was very little comment regarding the paving portion of the proposal, but yet many positive comments were received on the paving of the Placid Lake State Park, FWP will move ahead with paving of the day-use unit. However, FWP feels the need to do further analysis of paving the campground unit and therefore, it will not be a part of this proposed action at this time. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA with the MFWP responses in this Decision Notice. The final EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the above address. Please direct any further requests or questions to Mack Long, Region Two Supervisor.

In accordance with MFWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.



Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

6/26/08

Date